

MUSIC.

WAGNER'S "TRISTAN UND ISOLDE."

VI.

After all has been said in praise or in condemnation of "Tristan und Isolde" that can be said from a study of the printed page its best advocate and severest judge must in the end derive their conclusive arguments from a stage representation. A dramatic work, whether written for speech or for song, becomes truly vital only on the stage, and it is to the representation, therefore, that the final appeal must be made. Between the book and the performance there are frequent contradictions in this drama, as in nearly all others of Wagner, and perhaps an equal amount of praise and of condemnation would fall to the ground if those who pronounce them were obliged to base their opinions on what they see and hear in the theatre instead of what they dug out of book and score in their studies. This being true, New Yorkers are to be congratulated on being a most wonderfully favored community, so far as an opportunity to enjoy this drama is concerned.

We speak advisedly. "Tristan und Isolde" sets before us two foremost characters the severest problem and the most difficult task of any work in the operatic list. After completion it waited six years for stage production, and Wagner found it necessary even in 1865, when he had an ideal representative of *Tristan* in the tenor Schnorr von Carolsfeld, to make excisions in order to keep the drama "practicable."

From 1865 until last summer, wherever it has been given extensive cuts have been made, though every bar was gradually yielded, if yielded at all, by the extreme wing among Wagner's admirers. Last summer at Bayreuth the work was given in its integrity, and great was the rejoicing therat in the Wagnerian Mecca; but the fact adduced no argument to the case. The conditions at the Bayreuth festivals are unique. Not only are the performers inspired by a degree of artistic devotion not to be found under ordinary circumstances, but they are given long resting spells between the acts. The public, too, bring into the theatre a greater enthusiasm and a larger supply of endurance than are commonly found. New enthusiasm and endurance are both wanted in those who wish to be really appreciative of "Tristan"; and this truth is no reflection on the work. Appreciation of "Tristan" is more than anything else a matter of emotion. The music with its tumultuous lava-current attacks one's emotional part more than the intellect or the judgment. This is one of the grounds on which excisions are to be recommended, for there were moments in the representation last Wednesday evening when the emotional tension was great beyond the bounds of pleasure. For the performers the need of excisions grew out of physical reasons. No singer would be willing to do all the work which Wagner assigns to *Tristan* and *Isolde* under ordinary operatic conditions. It would be ruinous to their voices if they attempted it. This, unquestionably, is a defect in the work which is only to be explained on the ground of Wagner's well-known indifference to the limits of vocal possibility. Other excisions are demanded by mistakes traceable to Wagner's study. The cuts made in the Metropolitan Opera House point out these mistakes. They are chiefly in the love duet of the second act, the speech of *King Mark* after the discovery, and the death scene of *Rhegane* which occupies nearly all of the third act.

Concerning the beauty of the duet we have already spoken. It is the composer's boldest and most successful effort to give musical expression to hot, unbridled passion, which puts itself into antagonism with all the world. At its climax on Wednesday the furthest limit of expression by sound seemed to have been reached. It alternated between accents of intense yearning and passionate outpourings like boiling tempests. In the beginning of the duet the playing of the orchestra, to which Herr Schnorr had transmitted the inspiring spirit, there seemed to be an utter forgetfulness of all surroundings, and even of the very person of which he was born beyond the limits of the moment. This duet when performed as Wagner wrote it, and as it was heard in Bayreuth last summer, is thirty minutes long. Herr Ashton, however, in his introduction gives a full account of the legend in its amplified form from the translation of the "Legenda Aurea," published by Caxton in 1483. His additional illustrations comprise drawings of some fifteenth century frescoes which formerly adorned the chapel of the Guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-on-Avon, but which are now destroyed.

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